

VILE BODIES

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With Love to
**BRYAN AND DIANA
GUINNESS**

VILE BODIES

'Well in our country,' said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd generally get to somewhere else - if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing.'

'I like sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'

'If I wasn't real,' Alice said - half laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous - 'I shouldn't be able to cry.'

'I hope you don't suppose those are real tears!' cried the Queen, interrupted in a tone of great contempt.

Through the Looking-Glass

Chapter One

IT was clearly going to be a bad crossing.

With Asiatic resignation Father Rothschild S J put down his suitcase in the corner of the bar and went on deck. (It was a small suitcase of imitation crocodile hide. The initials stamped on it in Gothic characters were not Father Rothschild's, for he had borrowed it that morning from the *valet-de-chambre* of his hotel. It contained some rudimentary underclothes, six important new books in six languages, a false beard and a school atlas and *gazetteer* heavily annotated.) Standing on the deck Father Rothschild leant his elbows on the rail, rested his chin in his hands and surveyed the procession of passengers coming up the gangway, each face eloquent of polite misgiving.

Very few of them were unknown to the Jesuit, for it was his happy knack to remember everything that could possibly be learned about everyone who could possibly be of any importance. His tongue protruded very slightly and, had they not all been so concerned with luggage and the weather, someone might have observed in him a peculiar resemblance to those plaster reproductions of the gargoyles of Notre Dame which may be seen in the shop windows of artists' colourmen tinted the colour of 'Old Ivory', peering intently from among stencil outlines and plasticine and tubes of water-colour paint. High above his head swung Mrs Melrose Ape's travel-worn Packard car, bearing the dust of three continents, at last the darkening sky, and up the companion-way at the head of her angels strode Mrs Melrose Ape, the woman evangelist.

'Faith.'

'Here, Mrs Ape.'

'Charity.'

'Here, Mrs Ape.'

'Fortitude.'

'Here Mrs Ape.'

'Charity... Where is Chastity?'

'Chastity didn't feel well Mrs Ape She went below.'

'That girl's more trouble than she's worth Whenever there's any packing to be done Chastity doesn't feel well. Are all the rest here Humility, Prudence, Divine Discontent, Mercy Justice and Creative Endeavour?'

'Creative Endeavour lost her wings Mrs Ape She got talking to a gentleman in the train... Oh, there she is.'

'Got 'em' said Mrs Ape

Too breathless to speak, Creative Endeavour nodded (Each of the angels carried her wings in a little black box like a violin case)

'Right' said Mrs Ape 'and just you hold on to 'em tight and not so much talking to gentlemen in trains You're an old not up to see'

The meek crowd sat together disconsolately. It was awful when Mrs Ape was like this. My how they would pinch Charity and Creative Endeavour when they sat them alone in their nightshirt. It was bad enough their going to be so sick without that Mrs Ape pitching into them too.

Seeing their discomfit, Mrs Ape softened and smiled. She was nothing if not magnetic.

'Well souls' he said 'I must be getting along. They say it's going to be rough, but don't you believe it. If you have peace in your hearts your stomach will look after itself, and remember if you do feel queer - sing. There's nothing like it.'

'Good-bye, Mrs Ape, and thank you' said the angels they bobbed prettily, turned about and trooped off to the second-class part of the ship. Mrs Ape watched them

benignly, then, squaring her shoulders and looking (except that she had really no beard to speak of) every inch a sailor, strode resolutely forward to the first-class bar.

*

Other prominent people were embarking, all very unhappy about the weather; to avert the terrors of sea-sickness they had indulged in every kind of civilized witchcraft, but they were lacking in faith.

Miss Runcible was there, and Miles Malpractice, and all the Younger Set. They had spent a jolly morning strapping each other's tummies with sticking plaster (how Miss Runcible had wriggled).

The Right Honourable Walter Outrage, M.P., last week's Prime Minister, was there. Before breakfast that morning (which had suffered in consequence) Mr Outrage had taken twice the maximum dose of a patent preparation of chloral, and losing heart later had finished the bottle in the train. He moved in an uneasy trance, closely escorted by the most public-looking detective sergeants. These men had been with Mr Outrage in Paris, and what they did not know about his goings on was not worth knowing, at least from a novelist's point of view. (When they spoke about him to each other they called him 'the Right Honourable Rape', but that was more by way of being a pun about his name than a criticism of the conduct of his love affairs, in which, if the truth were known, he displayed a notable diffidence and the liability to panic.)

*

Lady Throbbing and Mrs Blackwater, those twin sisters whose portrait by Millais auctioned recently at Christie's made a record in rock-bottom prices, were

sitting on one of the teak benches eating apples and drinking what Lady Throbbing, with late Victorian *chic*, called 'a bottle of pop', and Mrs Blackwater, more exotically, called '*champagne*', pronouncing it as though it were French.

'Surely, Kitty, that is Mr Outrage, last week's Prime Minister.'

'Nonsense, Fanny, where?'

'Just in front of the two men with bowler hats, next to the clergyman.'

'It is certainly like his photographs. How strange he looks.'

'Just like poor Throbbing ... all that last year.'

'... And none of us even suspected ... until they found the bottles under the board in his dressing-room ... and we all used to think it was drink ...'

'I don't think one finds *quite* the same class as Prime Minister nowadays, do you think?'

'They say that only *one* person *has* any influence with Mr Outrage ...'

'At the Japanese Embassy ...'

'Of course, dear, not so loud. But tell me, Fanny, seriously, do you think really and truly Mr Outrage has it?'

'He has a very nice figure for a man of his age.'

'Yes, but *his* age, and the bull-like type is so often disappointing. Another glass? You will be grateful for it when the ship begins to move.'

'I ~~quite~~ thought we *were* moving.'

'How absurd you are, Fanny, and yet I can't help laughing.'

~~So arm in arm and shaken by little giggles the two tipsy old ladies went down to their cabin.~~

Of the other passengers, some had filled their ears with cotton-wool, others wore smoked glasses, while several ate

dry captain's biscuits from paper bags, as Red Indians are said to eat snake's flesh to make them cunning. Mrs Hoop repeated feverishly over and over again a formula she had learned from a yogi in New York City. A few 'good sailors', whose luggage bore the labels of many voyages, strode aggressively about smoking small, foul pipes and trying to get up a four of bridge.

Two minutes before the advertised time of departure, while the first admonitory whistling and shouting was going on, a young man came on board carrying his bag. There was nothing particularly remarkable about his appearance. He looked exactly as young men like him do look; he was carrying his own bag, which was disagreeably heavy, because he had no money left in francs and very little left in anything else. He had been two months in Paris writing a book and was coming home because, in the course of his correspondence, he had got engaged to be married. His name was Adam Fenwick-Synes.

Father Rothschild smiled at him in a kindly manner.

'I doubt whether you remember me,' he said. 'We met at Oxford five years ago at luncheon with the Dean of Balliol. I shall be interested to read your book when it appears - an autobiography, I understand. And may I be one of the first to congratulate you on your engagement? I am afraid you will find your father-in-law a little eccentric - and forgetful. He had a nasty attack of bronchitis this winter. It's a draughty house - far too big for these days. Well, I must go below now. It is going to be rough and I am a bad sailor. We meet at Lady Metroland's on the twelfth, if not, as I hope, before.'

Before Adam had time to reply the Jesuit disappeared. Suddenly the head popped back.

'There is an extremely dangerous and disagreeable woman on board - a Mrs Ape.'

Then he was gone again, and almost at once the boat

began to slip away from the quay towards the mouth of the harbour.

Sometimes the ship pitched and sometimes she rolled, and sometimes she stood quite still and shivered all over, poised above an abyss of dark water; then she would go swooping down like a scenic railway train into a windless hollow and up again with a rush into the gale; sometimes she would burrow her path, with convulsive nosings and scramblings like a terrier in a rabbit hole; and sometimes she would drop dead like a lift. It was this last movement that caused the most havoc among the passengers.

'Oh,' said the Bright Young People, 'Oh, oh oh.'

'It's just exactly like being inside a cocktail shaker,' said Miles Malpractice. 'Darling, your face — eau de Nil.'

'Too, too sick-making,' said Miss Runcible, with one of her rare flashes of accuracy.

Kitty Blackwater and Fanny Throbbing lay one above the other in their bunks head from whirr to toot.

'I wonder, do you think the *champagne* ...?'

'Kitty.'

'Yes, Fanny dear.'

'Kitty, I think, in fact. I am sure I have some sal volatile. ... Kitty, I thought that perhaps as you are nearer ... it would really hardly be safe for me to try and descend ... I might break a leg.'

'Not after *champagne*, Fanny, do you think?'

'But I need it! Of course, dear, if it's too much trouble?'

'Nothing is too much trouble, darling, you know that. But now I come to think of it, I remember, quite clearly, for a fact, that you did *not* pack the sal volatile.'

'Oh, Kitty, oh. Kitty, please ... you would be sorry for this if I died ... oh.'

'But I saw the sal volatile on your dressing-table after

your luggage had gone down, dear. I remember thinking, I must take that down to Fanny, and then, dear, I got confused over the tips, so you see ...'

'I ... put ... it ... in ... myself. ... Next to my brushes ... you ... beast.'

'Oh, Fanny ...'

'Oh ... Oh ... Oh.'

*

To Father Rothschild no passage was worse than any other. He thought of the sufferings of the saints, the mutability of human nature, the Four Last Things, and between whiles repeated snatches of the penitential psalms.

*

The Leader of his Majesty's Opposition lay sunk in a rather glorious coma, made splendid by dreams of Oriental imagery — of painted paper houses; of golden dragons and gardens of almond blossom; of golden limbs and almond eyes, humble and caressing; of very small golden feet among almond blossoms; of little painted cups full of golden tea; of a golden voice singing behind a painted paper screen; of humble, caressing little golden hands and eyes shaped like almonds and the colour of night.

Outside his door two very limp detective sergeants had deserted their posts.

'The bloke as could make trouble on a ship like this 'ere deserves to get away with it,' they said.

The ship creaked in every plate, doors slammed, trunks fell about, the wind howled; the screw, now out of the water, now in, raced and churned, shaking down hat-boxes like ripe apples; but above all the roar and clatter there rose from the second-class ladies' saloon the despair-

ing voices of Mrs Ape's angels, in frequently broken unison, singing, singing, wildly, desperately, as though their hearts would break in the effort and their minds lose their reason, Mrs Ape's famous hymn, *There ain't no flies on the Lamb of God.*

*

The Captain and the Chief Officer sat on the bridge engrossed in a crossword puzzle.

'Looks like we may get some heavy weather if the wind gets up,' he said. 'Shouldn't wonder if there wasn't a bit of a sea running to-night.'

'Well, we can't always have it quiet like this,' said the Chief Officer. 'Word of eighteen letters meaning carnivorous mammal. Search me if I know how they do think of these things.'

*

Adam Fenwick-Symes sat among the good sailors in the smoking room drinkin' his third Irish whisky and wondering how soon he would feel definitely ill. Already there was a vague depression gathering at the top of his head. There were thirty five minutes more, probably longer with the head wind keeping them back.

Opposite him sat a much-travelled and chatty journalist telling him smutty stories from time to time. Adam interposed some more or less appropriate comment. 'No, I say that's a good one', or, 'I must remember that', or just 'Ha, Ha, Ha', but his mind was not really in a receptive condition.

Up went the ship, up, up, up, paused and then plunged down with a ~~sudden~~ ^{violent} ~~slither~~ ^{plunge}. Main caught at his glass and saved it. Then shut his eyes.

'Now I'll tell you a drawing-room one,' said the journalist.

Behind them a game of cards was in progress among the commercial gents. At first they had rather a jolly time about it, saying, 'What ho, she bumps', or 'Steady, the Buffs', when the cards and glasses and ash-tray were thrown on to the floor, but in the last ten minutes they were growing notably quieter. It was rather a nasty kind of hush.

'... And forty aces and two-fifty for the rubber. Shall we cut again or stay as we are?'

'How about knocking off for a bit? Makes me tired – table moving about all the time.'

'Why, Arthur, you ain't feeling ill, surely?'

'Course I ain't feeling ill, only tired.'

'Well, of course, if Arthur's feeling ill ...'

'Who'd have thought of old Arthur feeling ill?'

'I ain't feeling ill, I tell you. Just tired. But if you boys want to go on I'm not the one to spoil a game.'

'Good old Arthur. Course he ain't feeling ill. Look out for the cards, Bill, up she goes again.'

'What about one all round? Same again?'

'Same again.'

'Good luck, Arthur.' 'Good luck.' 'Here's fun.' 'Down she goes.'

'Whose deal? You dealt last. didn't you, Mr Henderson?'

'Yes, Arthur's deal.'

'Your deal, Arthur. Cheer up, old scout.'

'Don't you go doing that. It isn't right to hit a chap on the back like that.'

'Look out with the cards, Arthur.'

'Well, what d'you expect, bring hit on the back like that. Makes me tired.'

'Here, I got fifteen cards.'

'I wonder if you've heard this one,' said the journalist. 'There was a man lived at Aberdeen, and he was terribly

keen on fishing, so when he married, he married a woman with worms. That's rich, eh? You see he was keen on fishing, see, and she had worms, see, he lived in Aberdeen. That's a good one, that is.'

'D'you know, I think I shall go on deck for a minute. A bit stuffy in here, don't you think?'

'You can't do that. The sea's coming right over it all the time. Not feeling queer, are you?'

'No, of course I'm not. feeling queer. I only thought a little fresh air. ... Christ, why don't the damn thing stop?'

'Steady, old boy. I wouldn't go trying to walk about, not if I were you. Much better stay just where you are. What you want is a spot of whisky.'

'Not feeling ill, you know. Just stuffy.'

'That's all right, old boy. Trust Auntie.'

The bridge party was not being a success.

'Hullo, Mr Henderson. What's that spade?'

'That's the ace, that is.'

'I can see it's the ace. What I mean you didn't ought to have trumped that last trick not if you had a spade.'

'What d'you mean, didn't ought to have trumped it? Trumps led.'

'No, they did *not*. Arthur led a spade.'

'He led a trump, didn't you, Arthur?'

'Arthur led a spade.'

'He couldn't have led a spade because for why he put a heart on my king of spades when I thought he had the queen. He hasn't got no spades.'

'What d'you mean, not got no spades? I got the queen.'

'Arthur, old man, you *must* be feeling queer.'

'No, I ain't, I tell you, just tired. You'd be tired if you'd been hit on the back same as I was ... anyway I'm fed up with this game ... there go the cards again.'

This time no one troubled to pick them up. Presently Mr Henderson said, 'Funny thing, don't know why I feel all swimmy of a sudden. Must have ate something that wasn't quite right. You never can tell with foreign foods - all messed up like they do.'

'Now you mention it, I don't feel too spry myself. Damn bad ventilation on these Channel boats.'

'That's what it is. Ventilation. You said it.'

'You know I'm funny. I never feel sea-sick, mind, but I often find going on boats doesn't agree with me.'

'I'm like that, too.'

'Ventilation ... a disgrace.'

'Lord, I shall be glad when we get to Dover. Home, sweet home, eh?'

Adam held on very tightly to the brass-bound edge of the table and felt a little better. He was *not* going to be sick, and that was that; not with that gargoyle of a man opposite anyway. They *must* be in sight of land soon.

*

It was at this time, when things were at their lowest, that Mrs Ape reappeared in the smoking-room. She stood for a second or two in the entrance balanced between swinging door and swinging door-post; then as the ship momentarily righted herself, she strode to the bar, her feet well apart, her hands in the pockets of her tweed coat.

'Double rum,' she said and smiled magnetically at the miserable little collection of men seated about the room. 'Why, boys,' she said, 'but you're looking terrible put out over something. What's it all about? Is it your souls that's wrong or is it that the ship won't keep still? Rough? 'Course it's rough. But let me ask you this. If you're put out this way over just an hour's sea-sickness' ('Not sea-sick, ventilation,' said Mr Henderson mechanically),

'what are you going to be like when you make the mighty big journey that's waiting for us all? Are you right with God?' said Mrs Ape. 'Are you prepared for death?'

'Oh, am I not?' said Arthur. 'I 'aven't thought of nothing else for the last half-hour.'

'Now, boys, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to sing a song together, you and me.' ('Oh, God,' said Adam.) 'You may not know it, but you are. You'll feel better for it body and soul. It's a song of Hope. You don't hear much about Hope these days, do you? Plenty about Faith, plenty about Charity. They've forgotten all about Hope. There's only one great evil in the world to-day. Despair. I know all about England, and I tell you straight, boys, I've got the goods for you. Hope's what you want and Hope's what I got. Here, steward, hand round these leaflets. There's the song on the back. Now all together ... sing. Five bob for you, steward, if you can shout me down. Splendid, all together, boys.'

In a rich, very audible voice Mrs Ape led the singing. Her arms rose, fell and fluttered with the rhythm of the song. The bar steward was hers already — inaccurate sometimes in his reading of the words, but with a sustained power in the low notes that defied competition. The journalist joined in next and Arthur set up a little hum. Soon they were all at it, singing like blazes, and it is undoubtedly true that they felt the better for it.

Father Rothschild heard it and turned his face to the wall.

Kitty Blackwater heard it.
'Fanny.'



'Well.'

'Fanny, dear, do you hear singing?'

'Yes, dear, thank you.'

'Fanny, dear, I hope they aren't holding a *service*. I mean, dear, it sounds so like a hymn. Do you think, possibly, we are *in danger*? Fanny, are we going to be wrecked?'

'I should be neither surprised nor sorry.'

'Darling, how can you? ... We should have heard it, shouldn't we, if we had actually *hit* anything? ... Fanny, dear, if you like I will have a look for your sal volatile.'

'I hardly think that would be any help, dear, since you *saw* it on my dressing-table.'

'I may have been mistaken.'

'You *said* you *saw* it.'

*

The Captain heard it. 'All the time I been at sea,' he said, 'I never could stand for missionaries.'

'Word of six letters beginning with ZB,' said the Chief Officer, 'meaning "used in astronomic calculation".'

'Z can't be right,' said the Captain after a few minutes' thought.

*

The Bright Young People heard it. 'So like one's first parties,' said Miss Runcible, 'being sick with other people singing.'

*

Mrs. Hoop heard it. 'Well,' she thought, 'I'm through with theosophy after this journey. Reckon I'll give the Catholics the once over.'

*

Aft, in the second-class saloon, where the screw was doing its worst, the angels heard it. It was some time since they had given up singing.

'Her again,' said Divine Discontent.

*

Mr Outrage alone lay happily undisturbed, his mind absorbed in lovely dream sequences of a world of little cooing voices, so caressing, so humble; and dark eyes, night-coloured, the shape of almonds over painted paper screens; little golden bodies, so flexible, so firm, so surprising in the positions they assumed.

*

They were still singing in the smoking-room when, in very little more than her usual time, the ship came into the harbour at Dover. Then Mrs Ape, as was her invariable rule, took round the hat and collected nearly two pounds, not counting her own five shillings which she got back from the bar steward. 'Salvation doesn't do them the same good if they think it's free,' was her favourite axiom.

Chapter Two

'HAVE you anything to declare?'

'Wings.'

'Have you wore them?'

'Sure.'

'That's all right, then.'

'Divine Discontent gets all the smiles all the time,' complained Fortitude to Prudence. 'Golly, but it's good to be on dry land.'

Unsteadily, but with renewed hope, the passengers had disembarked.

Father Rothschild fluttered a diplomatic *laissez-passer* and disappeared in the large car that had been sent to meet him. The others were jostling one another with their luggage, trying to attract the Customs officers and longing for a cup of tea.

'I got half a dozen of the best stowed away,' confided the journalist. 'They're generally pretty easy after a bad crossing.' And sure enough he was soon settled in the corner of a first-class carriage (for the paper was, of course, paying his expenses) with his luggage safely chalked in the van.

It was some time before Adam could get attended to.

'I've nothing but some very old clothes and some books,' he said.

But here he showed himself deficient in tact, for the man's casual air disappeared in a flash.

'Books, eh?' he said. 'And what sort of books, may I ask?'

'Look for yourself.'

'Thank you, that's what I mean to do. *Books*, indeed.'

Adam wearily unstrapped and unlocked his suitcase.

"Yes," said the Customs officer menacingly, as though his worst suspicions had been confirmed, "I should just about say you had got some books."

One by one he took the books out and piled them on the counter. A copy of *Dante* excited his especial disgust.

"French, eh?" he said. "I guessed as much, and pretty dirty, too, I shouldn't wonder. Now just you wait while I look up these here *books* — how he said it! — 'in my list. Particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside. That's what he said the other day in Parliament, and I says 'Hear, hear. ...'" Hullo, hullo, what's this, may I ask?"

Gingerly, as though it might at any moment explode, he produced and laid on the counter a large pile of typescript.

"That's a book, too," said Adam. "One I've just written. It is my *memoirs*."

"Ho, it is, is it? Well, I'll take that along, too, to the chief. You better come too."

"But I've got to catch the train."

"You come along. There's worse things than missing trains," he hinted darkly.

They went together into an inner office, the walls of which were lined with contraband pornography and strange instruments, whose purpose Adam could not guess. From the next room came the shrieks and yells of poor Miss Runcible, who had been mistaken for a well-known jewel smuggler, and was being stripped to the skin by two terrific wardresses.

"Now then, what's this about books?" said the chief.

With the help of a printed list (which began 'Aristotle, Works of (Illustrated)') they went through Adam's books, laboriously, one at a time, spelling out the titles.

Miss Runcible came through the office, working hard with lipstick and compact.

'Adam, darling, I never saw you on the boat,' she said. 'My dear, I can't *tell* you the *things* that have been happening to me in there. The way they looked ... too, too shaming. Positively surgical, my dear, and *such* wicked old women, just like *Dowagers*, my dear. As soon as I get to London I shall just ring up every Cabinet Minister and *all* the newspapers and give them all the most shy-making details.'

The chief was at this time engrossed in Adam's memoirs, giving vent at intervals to a sinister chuckling sound that was partly triumphant and partly derisive, but in the main genuinely appreciative.

'Coo, Bert,' he said. 'Look at this; that's rich, ain't it?'

Presently he collected the sheets, tied them together and put them on one side.

'Well, see here,' he said. 'You can take these books on architecture and the dictionary, and I don't mind stretching a point for once and letting you have the history books, too. But this book on Economics comes under Subversive Propaganda. That you leaves behind. And this here *Purgatorio* doesn't look right to me, so that stays behind, pending inquiries. But as for this autobiography, that's just downright dirt, and we burns that straight away, see.'

'But, good heavens, there isn't a word in the book - you must be misinterpreting it.'

'Not so much of it. I know dirt when I sees it or I shouldn't be where I am to-day.'

'But do you realize that my whole livelihood depends on this book?'

'And *my* livelihood depends on stopping works like this coming into the country. Now 'ook it quick if you don't want a police-court case.'

'Adam, angel, don't fuss or we shall miss the train.'

Miss Runcible took his arm and led him back to the station and told him all about a lovely party that was going to happen that night.

*

'Queer, who felt queer?'

'You did, Arthur.'

'No I never ... just tired.'

'It certainly was stuffy in there just for a bit.'

'Wonderful how that old girl cheered things up. Got a meeting next week in the Albert Hall.'

'Shouldn't be surprised if I didn't go. What do you say, Mr Henderson?'

'She got a troupe of angels, so she said. All dressed up in white with wings, lovely. Not a bad-looker herself, if it comes to that.'

'What did you put in the plate, Arthur?'

'Half-crown.'

'So did I. Funny thing, I ain't never give a half-crown like that before. She kind of draws it out of you, damned if she doesn't.'

'You won't get away from the Albert Hall not without putting your hand in your pocket.'

'No, but I'd like to see those angels dressed up, eh, Mr Henderson?'

*

'Fanny, surely that is Agatha Runcible, poor Viola Chasin's daughter?'

'I wonder Viola allows her to go about like that. If she were my daughter ...'

'Your daughter, Fanny. ...'

'Kitty, that was not kind.'

'My dear, I only meant ... have you, by the way, heard of her lately?"

"The last we heard was worse than anything, Kitty. She has left Buenos Aires. I am afraid she has severed her connection with Lady Metroland altogether. They think that she is some kind of touring company.'

"Darling, I'm sorry. I should never have mentioned it, but whenever I see Agatha Runcible I can't help thinking ... girls seem to know so much nowadays. We had to learn everything for ourselves, didn't we, Fanny, and it took so long. If I'd had Agatha Runcible's chances ... Who is the young man with her?"

"I don't know, and frankly, I don't think, do you? ... He has that self-contained look."

"He has very nice eyes. And he moves well."

"I dare say when it came to the point ... Still, as I say, if I had had Agatha Runcible's advantages ..."

"What are you looking for, darling?"

"Why, darling, such an extraordinary thing. Here is the sal volatile next to my brushes all the time."

"Fanny, how awful of me, if I'd only known ..."

"I dare say there must have been another bottle you saw on the dressing-table, sweetest. Perhaps the maid put it there. You never know at the Lotti, do you?"

"Fanny, forgive me. ..."

"But, dearest, what is there to forgive? After all, you did see another bottle, didn't you, Kitty darling?"

"Why, look, there's Miles."

"Miles?"

"Your son, darling. My nephew, you know."

"Miles. Do you know, Kitty, I believe it is. He never comes to see me now, the naughty boy."

"My dear, he looks terribly *tapette*."

"Darling, I know. It is a great grief to me. Only I try

not to think about it too much — he had so little chance with poor Throbbing what he was.'

'The sins of the fathers, Fanny ...'

*

Somewhere not far from Maidstone Mr Outrage became fully conscious. Opposite him in the carriage the two detectives slept, their bowler hats jammed forwards on their foreheads, their mouths open, their huge red hands lying limply in their laps. Rain beat on the windows; the carriage was intensely cold and smelt of stale tobacco. Inside there were advertisements of horrible picturesque ruins; outside in the rain were hoardings advertising patent medicines and dog biscuits. 'Every Molassine dog cake wags a tail,' Mr Outrage read, and the train repeated over and over again, 'Right Honourable gent, Right Honourable gent, Right Honourable gentleman, Right Honourable gent ...'

*

Adam got into the carriage with the Younger Set. They still looked a bit queer, but they cheered up wonderfully when they heard about Miss Runcible's outrageous treatment at the hands of the Customis officers.

'Well,' they said, 'Well' how too, too shaming, Agatha, darling,' they said. 'How devastating, how unpoliceman-like, how goat-like, how sick-making, how too, too awful.' And then they began talking about Archie Schwert's party that night.

'Who's Archie Schwert?' asked Adam.

'Oh, he's someone new since you went away. The *most* bogus man. Miles discovered him, and since then he's been climbing and climbing and *climbing*, my dear, till he hardly knows us. He's rather sweet, really, only too terribly common, poor darling. He lives at the Ritz, and I think that's rather grand, don't you?'

'Is he giving his party there?"

'My dear, of course not. In Edward Throbbing's house. He's Miles' brother, you know, only he's frightfully dim and political, and doesn't know anybody. He got ill and went to Kenya or somewhere and left his perfectly sheepish house in Hertford Street, so we've all gone to live there. You'd better come, too. The caretakers didn't like it a bit at first, but we gave them drinks and things, and now they're simply thrilled to the marrow about it and spend all their time cutting out "bits", my dear, from the papers about our goings on.'

'One awful thing is we haven't got a car. Miles broke it, Edward's, I mean, and we simply can't afford to get it mended so I think we shall have to move soon. Everything's getting rather broken up, too, and dirty, if you know what I mean. Because, you see, there aren't any servants, only the butler and his wife, and they are always tight now. So demoralising. Mary Mouse has been a perfect angel and sent us great hampers of cakes and things. . She's paying for Archie's party to-night, of course.'

'Do you know, I rather think I am going to be sick again."

'Oh, Miles!"

(Oh, Bright Young People!)

*

Packed all together in a second-class carriage, the angels were late in recovering their good humour.

'She's taken Prudence off in her car again,' said Divine Discontent, who once, for one delirious fortnight, had been Mrs Ape's favourite girl. 'Can't see what she sees in her. What's London like, Fortitude? I never been there but once.'

'Just exactly heaven. Shops and all.'

'What are the men like, Fortitude?'

'Say, don't you never think of nothing but *men*,
Chastity?'

'I should say I do. I was only asking.'

'Well, they ain't much to look at, not after the shops.
But they has their uses.'

'Say, did you hear that? You're a cute one, Fortitude.
Did you hear what Fortitude said? She said "they have
their uses".'

'What, shops?'

'No, silly, men'

'Men! That's a good one, I should say.'

Presently the train arrived at Victoria, and all these
passengers were scattered all over London.

Adam left his bag at Shepheard's Hotel, and drove straight to Henrietta Street to see his publishers. It was nearly closing time, so that most of the staff had packed up and gone home, but by good fortune Mr Sam Bensfleet, the junior director with whom Adam always did his business, was still in his room correcting proofs for one of his women novelists. He was a competent young man, with a restrained elegance of appearance (the stenographer always trembled slightly when she brought him his cup of tea).

'No, she can't print that,' he kept saying, endorsing one after another of the printer's protests. 'No, damn it, she can't print *that*. She'll have us all in prison.' For it was one of his most exacting duties to 'ginger up' the more reticent of the manuscripts submitted and 'tone down' the more 'outspoken' until he had reduced them all to the acceptable moral standard of his day.

He greeted Adam with the utmost cordiality.

'Well, well, Adam, how are you? This is nice. Sit

down. Have a cigarette. What a day to arrive in London. Did you have a good crossing?"

"Not too good."

"I say, I *am* sorry. Nothing so beastly as a beastly crossing, is there? Why don't you come round to dinner at Winipole Street to-night? I've got some rather nice Americans coming. Where are you staying?"

"At "Shepheard's" – Lottie Crump's."

"Well, that's always fun. I've been trying to get an autobiography out of Lottie for ten years. And that reminds me. You're bringing us your manuscript, aren't you? Old Rampole was asking about it only the other day. It's a week overdue, you know. I hope you'll like the preliminary notices we've sent out. We've fixed the day of publication for the second week in December, so as to give it a fortnight's run before Johnnie Hoop's autobiography. That's going to be a seller. Sails a bit near the wind in places. We had to cut out some things – you know what old Rampole is. Johnnie didn't like it a bit. But I'm looking forward terribly to reading yours."

"Well, Sam, rather an awful thing happened about that ..."

"I say, I hope you're not going to say it's not finished. The date on the contract, you know ..."

"Oh, it's finished all right. Burnt."

"Burnt?"

"Burnt."

"What an awful thing. I hope you are insured."

Adam explained the circumstances of the destruction of his autobiography. There was a longish pause while Sam Benfleet thought.

"What worries me is how are we going to make that sound convincing to old Rampole."

"I should think it sounded convincing enough."

~~You don't~~ know old Rampole. It's sometimes very

difficult for me, Adam, working under him. Now if I had my own way I'd say, "Take your own time. Start again. Don't worry ..." But there's old Rampole. He's a devil for contracts, you know, and you did *say*, didn't you ...? It's all very difficult. You know, I wish it hadn't happened.'

'So do I, oddly enough,' said Adam.

'There's another difficulty. You've had an advance already, haven't you? Fifty pounds, wasn't it? Well, you know, *that* makes things very difficult. Old Rampole never likes big advances like that to young authors. You know I hate to say it, but I can't help feeling that the best thing would be for you to repay the advance – plus interest, of course, old Rampole would insist on that – and cancel the contract. Then if you ever thought of re-writing the book, well, of course, we should be delighted to consider it. I suppose that – well, I mean, it *would* be quite *convenient*, and all that, to repay the advance?'

'Not only inconvenient, but impossible,' said Adam in no particular manner.

There was another pause.

'Deuced awkward,' said Sam Benfleet. 'It's a shame the way the Customs House officers are allowed to take the law into their own hands. Quite ignorant men, too. Liberty of the subject, I mean, and all that. I tell you what we'll do. We'll start a correspondence about it in the *New Statesman*. ... It is all so deuced awkward. But I think I can see a way out. I suppose you could get the book rewritten in time for the Spring List? Well, we'll cancel the contract and forget all about the advance. No, no, my dear fellow, don't thank me. If only I was alone here I'd be doing that kind of thing all day. Now instead we'll have a new contract. It won't be quite so good as the last, I'm afraid. Old Rampole wouldn't stand for

that. I'll tell you what, we'll give you our standard first-novel contract. I've got a printed form here. It won't take a minute to fill up. Just sign here.'

'May I just see the terms?'

'Of course, my dear fellow. They look a bit hard at first, I know, but it's our usual form. We made a very special case for you, you know. It's very simple. No royalty on the first two thousand, then a royalty of two and a half per cent, rising to five per cent on the tenth thousand. We retain serial, cinema, dramatic, American, Colonial and translation rights, of course. And, of course, ~~an~~ option on your next twelve books on the same terms. It's a very straightforward arrangement really. Doesn't leave room for any of the disputes which embitter the relations of author and publisher. Most of our authors are working on a contract like that. ... Splendid. Now don't you bother any more about that advance. I understand *perfectly*, and I'll square old Rampole somehow, even if it comes out of my director's fees.'

'Square old Rampole,' repeated Mr Benfleet thoughtfully as Adam went downstairs. It was fortunate, he reflected, that none of the authors ever came across the senior partner, that benign old gentleman, who once a week drove up to board meetings from the country, whose chief interest in the business was confined to the progress of a little book of his own about bee-keeping, which they had published twenty years ago and, though he did not know it, allowed long ago to drop out of print. He often wondered in his uneasy moments what he would find to say when Rampole died.

*

It was about now that Adam remembered that he was engaged to be married. The name of his young lady was Nina Blount. So he went into a tube station to a tele-

phone-box, which smelt rather nasty, and rang her up.

'Hello.'

'Hello.'

'May I speak to Miss Blount, please?"

'I'll just see if she's in,' said Miss Blount's voice. 'Who's speaking, please?' She was always rather snobbish about this fiction of having someone to answer the telephone.

'Mr Fenwick-Symes.'

'Oh.'

'Adam, you know. ... How are you, Nina?"

'Well, I've got rather a pain just at present.'

'Poor Nina. Shall I come round and see you?"

'No, don't do that, darling, because I'm just going to have a bath. Why don't we dine together?"

'Well, I asked Agatha Runcible to dinner.'

'Why?"

'She'd just had all her clothes taken off by some sailors.'

'Yes, I know, it's all in the evening paper to-night ... Well, I'll tell you what. Let's meet at Archie Schwert's party. Are you going?"

'I rather said I would.'

'That's all right, then. Don't dress up. No one will except Archie.'

'Oh, I say, Nina, there's one thing I don't think I shall be able to marry you after all.'

'Oh, Adam, you are a bore. Why not?"

'They burnt my book.'

'Beasts. Who did?"

'I'll tell you about it to-night.'

'Yes, do. Good-bye, darling'

'Good-bye, my sweet.'

He hung up the receiver and left the telephone-box. People had crowded into the Underground station for shelter from the rain, and were shaking their umbrellas.

and reading their evening papers. Adam could see the headlines over their shoulders.

**PEER'S DAUGHTER'S DOVER ORDFAL
SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS BY SOCIETY BEAUTY
HON. A RUNCIBLE SAYS
'TOO SHAMING'**

'Poor pretty,' said an indignant old woman at his elbow. 'Disgraceful. I calls it. And such a good sweet face. I see her picture in the papers only yesterday. Nasty prying mounds. That's what they got. And her poor father and all. Look, Jane, there's a picce about him, too. "Interviewed at the Carlton Club this evening, Lord Chasm", that's her dad. "refused to make a definite statement. 'The matter shall not be allowed to rest here,' he said." And quite right too, I says. You know I feels about that cul just as though it w^{as} me own daughter. Seeing her picture so often and our Sarah having done the back stairs, Tuesdays at them flats where her aunt used to live - the one as had that terrible divorce last year.'

Adam bought a paper. He had just ten shillings left in the world. It was too wet to walk, so he took a very crowded tube train to Dover Street and hurried across in the rain to Shepheard's Hotel (which, for the purposes of the narrative, may be assumed to stand at the corner of Hay Hill).